

Environmental Toxicology Program  
Bureau of Health, DHS  
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Fish is good for you.  
Eat fish low in mercury!

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# Protect your family. Eat fish low in mercury.



Dr. Dora Mills, Director, Maine Bureau of Health,  
with her family

"I want you to know that mercury in Maine fresh water fish can harm family health. Please follow the Safe Eating Guidelines."

## Safe Eating Guidelines

for fish from Maine lakes, ponds and rivers

- **Pregnant and nursing women**
- **Women who may get pregnant**
- **Children under age 8**  
SHOULD NOT EAT fresh water fish, EXCEPT 1 meal per *month* of brook trout or landlocked salmon.
- **All other adults, and children age 8 and older**  
CAN SAFELY EAT 2 meals per *month* of fresh water fish. For brook trout and landlocked salmon, 1 meal per *week* is safe.

## Mercury in Fish: The Problem You Can't See, Smell, or Taste

It's hard to believe that fish that looks, smells, and tastes fine may not be safe to eat. But the truth is that fish caught in Maine lakes, ponds, and rivers have mercury in them. Other states have this problem too. Mercury in the air settles into the waters. It then builds up in the fish. So older fish have higher levels of mercury than younger fish. Fish that eat other fish, like pickerel and bass, have the highest mercury levels.

## The Harm Caused by Mercury

Small amounts of mercury can damage a brain starting to form or grow. That's why babies in the womb, nursing babies, and young children are at most risk. Too much mercury may affect behavior and how well they learn, think, and problem solve later in life.

Mercury can also harm older children and adults, but it takes larger amounts. It may cause tingling, prickling, or numbness in hands and feet, or changes in vision. The Safe Eating Guidelines set limits to protect everyone.

## Can't we trim away or clean or cook the fish to get rid of the mercury?

No. The mercury gets into the flesh of the fish. It can't be cut away, cleaned, or cooked out.

## What about ocean fish?

Ocean fish and shellfish have mercury too. Most have low levels of mercury, but swordfish and shark have very high levels. **Follow the Safe Eating Guidelines for Ocean Fish on page 4.**



### Jim Brown:

"I've been fishing the lakes and rivers in these parts for over 60 years. Eaten my share of the fish too. I hate to admit it, but things have changed. They say the mercury mostly blows in from out of state. Been doing this for years, settling into the waters and building up in the fish. This is a heck of a fix to be in. But, I don't want my family hurt, so we follow the Safe Eating Guidelines for the fish we catch.

During fishing season, I eat some brook trout or landlocked salmon almost every week, but my grandson here only gets one meal per month. It's hard when he catches a fish and can't always bring it home to eat. But we have fun with catch and release fishing. It's safe for him and good for the fishery."

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HANG  
ME  
UP!

## The Fish

## Safe Eating Guidelines

### Fresh Water Fish

- ❖ Brook trout and landlocked salmon ..... **Limit:**
  - For pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under 8, **1 meal per month**
  - For all others, **1 meal per week**
- ❖ All other fish species ..... **Limit:**
  - For pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under 8, **NO meals**
  - For all others, **2 meals per month**

### Ocean Fish and Shellfish

- ❖ Striped bass and bluefish ..... **Limit:** For everyone, **2 meals per month**
- ❖ Swordfish, shark, tilefish and king mackerel ..... **Limit:**
  - For pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under 8, **NO meals**
  - For all others, **2 meals per month**
- ❖ Canned tuna (the 6 ounce size) ..... **Limit:**
  - For pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under 8, **1 can of "white" or 2 cans of "light" tuna per week**
  - No limits** for all others as part of a balanced diet
- ❖ All other ocean fish and shellfish including canned fish and shellfish ..... **Limit:**
  - For pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under 8, **2 meals per week**
  - No limits** for all others as part of a balanced diet

**You can mix and match fish with limits but stick to the lowest weekly or monthly limit. Don't add limits.**

## Ask Andy

Dr. Andy Smith, State Toxicologist, identifies when toxic chemicals such as mercury could harm the health of Maine people. To learn more, call him Toll Free: 866-292-3474.



Dear Andy: I'm confused. I thought fish was good for us. We're thinking about having a child. What should we do about eating fish?

- Suzanne and Bob

Dear Suzanne and Bob: Fish IS good for you and your family. It's low in fat and a good source of protein. It may also help protect against heart disease. Follow the guidelines for pregnant women 6 months BEFORE you plan to get pregnant. This gives your body time to get rid of mercury from fish you have already eaten. You can safely eat one meal per month of brook trout or landlocked salmon. Or, you can eat many ocean fish up to twice a week. Check the chart on page 4.

Dear Andy: If I follow the guidelines for fresh water fish, how sure can I be that my family is really safe?

- Larry

Dear Larry: Really sure. We have sampled over 2,000 fish from over 150 lakes and ponds. If you follow the guidelines, you're safe eating the fish from over 95% of Maine lakes and ponds. You will not get too much mercury according to limits approved by the National Academy of Sciences.



Dear Andy: I'm pregnant, and canned tuna is one of the few foods that tastes good and that I can keep down. How much is too much?

- Kim

Dear Kim: Canned tuna provides protein and other nutrients that you and your baby need. But, since it contains some mercury, eat only 2 cans of "**light** tuna" or 1 can of "**white** tuna" (also called Albacore tuna) per week. Light tuna has about half the mercury of white tuna. If you want to eat canned fish more often, try canned salmon. It is very low in mercury.

Dear Andy: Is mercury the only toxic pollution in fish that we need to worry about? I've heard there are problems with other chemicals too.

- Laura

Dear Laura: You're right. There are warnings about PCBs and Dioxins, chemicals that can cause cancer and other health problems if too much builds up in your body. The warnings are for fish caught in the Androscoggin River, parts of the Kennebec River, and a few others. Check the fishing rule book for that warning. Lobster tomalley (the green stuff inside a lobster body) is also high in PCBs and Dioxins. No one should eat it.

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Call us if you want to know more. As we learn more, safe eating guidelines could change. For now, this is the best information we have to protect our families.

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Kevin W. Concannon, Commissioner

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